



Assateague Coastal Trust – PO Box 731, Berlin, MD 21811 – 410-629-1538

---

## Testimony in Support of SB483

### This testimony covers these three key points:

1. The desperate need for well water remediation and data collection
2. Findings of the Lower Shore Safe Well Initiative (LSSWI)
3. Cancer rates and statistics as it relates to groundwater

January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023

Dear Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of **SB483**, on behalf of Assateague Coastal Trust (ACT), the Waterkeeper program for the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. ACT protects and defends the health of Delmarva's coastal waters through advocacy, education, science, and the enforcement of just and equitable clean water laws. If enacted, **SB483** will be vital for citizens of the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Assateague Coastal Trust is extremely concerned about the well water quality here on the Eastern Shore. Most of our constituents are on well water, or drink water from a well that is supplied by a municipality. The contaminants that are causing vast health concerns down here are often tasteless, colorless, and odorless. Currently, Maryland is ranked among the five states with the fewest protections regarding private wells. On the Eastern Shore, we are far behind on the desperately needed infrastructure to protect people from contamination of their drinking water, as well as have had massive gaps in research and public awareness of the health impacts of drinking contaminated water.

In 2021, the Center for Progressive Reform, the Assateague Coastal Trust, the Environmental Integrity Project, and the University of Maryland School of Public Health partnered to launch the **Lower Shore Safe Well Water Initiative (LSSWWI)**, whereby well owners in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester County could sign up to receive a free nitrate test kit in the mail. Between April and November, 127 wells on Maryland's Lower Shore were sampled. Here are the findings:

- **81 percent of participants had never tested their wells or had done so only once.** Only two participants reported testing their wells annually.
- **30 percent of participants reported having no water treatment systems in their homes**
- **41 percent said they had never received information about their well from any source**, including MDE and their local health department. The participants' wells ranged from two to 86 years old, with an average of 26 years.

**Overall, five percent of samples collected through the LSSWWI exceeded EPA's safe drinking water threshold for nitrate, and an additional 12 percent had nitrate levels that may be hazardous to health.** In a follow-up survey of participants, more than a third of respondents said that cost of testing and/or remediation, and/or not knowing where to get test kits were barriers to testing their well water.

Furthermore, 98 percent of respondents said they would support efforts by the state of Maryland to provide free or low-cost test kits to well owners and 87 percent of respondents said they would support efforts by the state of Maryland to provide grants to well owners to clean up contaminated wells.

**The time to act on this is now.** We know that cancer statistics for the lower Eastern shore of Maryland are some of the highest in the state. In 2020, a study was published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health that found that on Maryland’s Lower Eastern Shore “cancer patients were more likely to live in homes supplied by private well water compared to individuals in the general regional population.” According to the U.S. Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) database, “Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset counties have some of the highest rates of lung cancer, colorectal cancer, breast cancer, and melanoma in Maryland” [1].

Given the high prevalence of several cancer types, the potential for ground water contamination, and the popularity of private well water use in this rural region, evaluating the relationship between cancer diagnosis and water source on the lower Eastern shore bears serious consideration.

The Private Well Safety Act will provide roughly 830,000 Marylanders who get their drinking water from a private well with the necessary resources and information to monitor and safeguard their household drinking water, and ultimately protect their and their family’s health. We are urging to you to pass **SB483, The Private Well Safety Act** so that all Marylanders can have access to clean, safe drinking water.

Sincerely,



Gabrielle (Gabby) Ross  
**Assateague Coastkeeper**  
Assateague Coastal Trust  
443.235.2014  
**coastkeeper@actforbays.org**

---

Sources :

- [1] DeRidder, A., Kalluri, S., & Holdai, V. (2020, December 28). *A retrospective chart review evaluating the relationship between cancer diagnosis and residential water source on the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, USA*. International journal of environmental research and public health. Retrieved January 27, 2023, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7796121/#:~:text=Cancer%20statistics%20for%20the%20lower,melanoma%20in%20Maryland%20%5B21%5D>.